

SUPPLIED IN CONFIDENCE TO THE NSW I.C.A.C.

# [Service NSW 2021 COVID-19 Micro Business Grant] 'Retrospective Clawback and Extortion Scam'

[2022 - present]



## Witness Personal Account and Victim Impact Statement [Complainant #18]

The following written evidence received from Steven Ridd by email to [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au) .

[Emails (most recent at top)]

### START OF EVIDENCE

**From:** [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Thursday, 29 August 2024 11:58 AM

**To:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Cc:** [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au)

**Subject:** Grant review

Hi everyone

I have received my 3rd and final review outcome, which has been unsuccessful.

I am still trying other routes and will be contacting the ombudsman as well. Hoping I can delay my dated invoice "state debt" of 9th September and hoping for some intervention by someone with a little clout and common sense.

Hope you are all well and please keep us updated of any developments on your end.

Thanks

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

\*

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 28 August 2024 11:58 AM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** Review outcome

Hi Steve

I hope you had a good time away and when you read this email you would have returned and are rested after a long flight.

I just wanted to let you know that I have had my third and final review results and have been unsuccessful. I will attach the letter I received. My "State Debt" has now been forwarded to Revenue NSW and is due by the 9th September.

I will go to the ombudsman next week and hopefully that will delay it further until we have, hopefully, been able to get some intervention. I have again written to Minister Dib and to Greg Wells and will attach the letter for your interest.

I may have a further contact, if it pans out I will let you know. A win for one of us may lead to a win for all.

**(see 2 PDF letters attached)**

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, 17 August 2024 10:18 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
**Cc:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** Micro business grant

Hi everyone

I just wanted to open the dialogue between the people who would like to stay in contact especially while Steve is away.

I received an email from Jahid Dibs office yesterday. I hope it's a good sign. I've copied the email so you can recognise it if you get one as well.

I will be in touch if I have any further developments and hope you will do the same.

Kindest regards

[REDACTED]

Email as follows:

Thank you for your correspondence via your local Member of Parliament, regarding the compliance review of your 2021 COVID-19 Micro-Business Support Grant, including the potential repayments associated with this process.

We understand a Service NSW officer contacted you on 9 August to discuss your concerns about the compliance process and disappointment with the overall experience. We reiterate our apologies for the communication difficulties you experienced during your dealings with Service NSW.

We are advised Service NSW is still undertaking an internal review of your matter. We understand the debt related to the grant has been put on hold until 10 October while the internal review is completed. Service NSW will advise you directly of the outcome of the internal review when it has been finalised.

The NSW Government appreciates the audit process can be challenging for business owners who received grants. However, Service NSW must ensure that the distribution of funds by the NSW Government is conducted with fairness and to the highest ethical standards, ensuring equity for all NSW citizens.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

Kind Regards,

**Office of the Hon Jihad Dib MP**  
**Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government**  
**Minister for Emergency Services**  
**Minister for Youth Justice**  
T 02 7225 6090  
[nsw.gov.au](https://nsw.gov.au)  
52 Martin Place  
Sydney NSW 2000



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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 8 August 2024 6:40 PM  
**To:** [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au)  
**Subject:** My letter to Service NSW

Hi Steve

I have attached the letter I sent to Service NSW today after receiving an email from the Customer Resolution department, who have confirmed that they have put my debt on hold until further outcome of my review.

It may be useful to others facing the same circumstances.

kind regards



## Immediate concern is the demand for payment

On 17 May 2024, I received by MAIL, a tax invoice – pay now for **\$15,214**. The invoice notes a 'date of decision' as 5 July 2024 and issue date of 9 July 2004 with a payment date of 8 August 2024.

I raised a dispute with Service NSW on 5 July 2024 which was acknowledged as being raised on 5 July 2024 in correspondence from Service NSW dated 9 July 2024.

As the matter was under **internal review**, no invoice should have been issued.

I want an assurance from Service NSW that the tax invoice referred to Revenue NSW for collection is on hold and will not be enforced whilst the matter is in dispute.

### My Concerns:

1. **Lack of Reasons for Initial Notification:** The first notification on 4 May 2023 did not provide any reasons for ineligibility.
2. **Implications of Fraudulent Claims:** The email inferred that payments might be due to incorrect, misleading, or fraudulent claims, but there was no assertion that my information was incorrect, misleading, fraudulent, or in error.
3. **Provision of Additional Information:** All requested additional information was provided, consistent with the initial application, with no further requests regarding the calculation of aggregated income.
4. **No Indication of Income Threshold Issue:** The first notification did not indicate an issue with the aggregated income threshold of \$30,000.
5. **Initial Acceptance by Service NSW:** Service NSW initially assessed and approved the grant application as meeting the terms and conditions.
6. **Change in Assessment Without New Information:** The second notification on 2 July 2024 cited an issue with the aggregated annual turnover, but no information had changed since the initial application.
7. **Lack of Access to Application Copy:** I have not been provided with a copy of my application and had no access to it during the online process.

8. **Accuracy of Application Information:** All information in my application was true and correct at the time of submission and remains unchanged.
9. **Unclear Basis for Reassessment:** Without a copy of my application or a clear explanation of how the initial eligibility assessment was overturned, I cannot know what additional information would support my position.
10. **Reliance on Initial Approval:** I relied on the initial grant approval for business planning and financial management. The sudden demand for repayment disrupts my business and causes significant financial strain.
11. **Delayed Decision Impact:** If the grant had been denied initially, I would have been eligible to apply for hardship review, an application that is no longer available to me due to the time of consideration of the application. The delay in reassessment has put me at a significant disadvantage.
12. **Process and Procedural Fairness:** I have not received an outcome of the internal review, including the decision and reasons for it, nor the evidence on which it is based. Despite this, an invoice has been issued for recovery of the grant.
13. **Equitable Treatment:** I expect to be treated equitably and fairly, consistent with other businesses in similar situations. Any precedents where similar cases were resolved differently should be highlighted to show inconsistency in decision-making.
14. **Legitimate Expectation:** I had a legitimate expectation, based on the initial approval, that I was eligible for the grant. Any retrospective reassessment should be justified clearly and reasonably.

**My understanding of the service NSW internal review process is:**

- The Internal Review is a 'merit review' process. This means a review of the **facts of your application** by a team separate to the initial decision maker.
- Customers are given the opportunity to provide any further information or documents to be considered as part of the review of the administrative decision.
- The decision following the internal review is evidence-based and free of bias.
- The reasons for the decision – including the evidence on which the decision is based – are provided to the customer in simple and clear communication.

**I urge Service NSW to:**

- Provide a detailed explanation of the reassessment and how the original decision was overturned.
- Ensure the tax invoice referred to Revenue NSW is on hold during the dispute.
- Provide a copy of my application and all related documents.
- Treat this matter with the urgency and fairness it deserves.

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From: **Service NSW Customer Support** <[customersupport@service.nsw.gov.au](mailto:customersupport@service.nsw.gov.au)>

Date: Tue, 6 Aug 2024, 09:04

Subject: Dispute Outcome Delay [REDACTED]

To: [REDACTED]



Dear [REDACTED],

**Re: Review on grant application for 2021 Micro Business Support Payment for [REDACTED]**

As you are aware, the outcome of your Internal Review is due today, 06/08/2024. However, we are writing to advise that there will be a delay in providing the outcome of your Internal Review.

We are currently prioritising your request and are aiming to provide you with a response as soon as possible.

We apologise for an inconvenience to you as a result of this delay. We appreciate your understanding in this matter.

Sincerely,  
Customer Payments Support Team - Internal Reviews  
On behalf of Director of Customer Payments

Service NSW  
T 13 77 88



ref: [REDACTED]:ref

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**From:** [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Tuesday, 23 July 2024 4:52 PM

**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au

**Subject:** Re: Customer Service invoice redacted

Hi Steve

Just an update. Our [REDACTED] has sent a letter on my behalf to Minister Jihad Dib MP. I sent off the registered letter to Cassandra Gibbens (Executive Director, Business Bureau, Service NSW) yesterday.


I hope your interview with Current Affairs went well.

Thanks again for your assistance.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

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**Customer Service**  
ABN: 81 913 830 179

You are HERE

**TAX INVOICE – PAY NOW**

INVOICE NUMBER	
AMOUNT DUE	\$15,214.00
ISSUE DATE	09 JUL 2024
DUE DATE	08 AUG 2024

Pay by the due date to avoid additional fees

**FEE DETAILS**

COL application number:

Date of Decision: 05.07.24


**REASON FOR DETERMINATION**

The fees have been charged for the MB Support Grant 21 - Application as the eligibility criteria were not met.


CONTACT US [revenue.nsw.gov.au](https://revenue.nsw.gov.au) | 1300 655 805

This matter has been referred to **Revenue NSW** to commence collection of this invoice on behalf of Service NSW regarding the **MB Support Grant 21 - Application**.


If you wish to discuss this matter further, dispute the calculation findings or provide further information, please contact Revenue NSW on 1300 655 805.




Online: Visit [www.revenue.nsw.gov.au](https://www.revenue.nsw.gov.au) to pay by Mastercard or Visa.\*  
\*A card payment fee may apply. This fee is not subject to GST.



Phone: Call 1300 655 805 to pay by Mastercard or Visa.\*  
\*A card payment fee may apply. This fee is not subject to GST.



**BPAY:** Quote Biller Code **269967** and your Reference No.   
to pay using your cheque or savings account. Access BPAY via your financial institution's website or phone banking service. The BPAY details are unique for each invoice.



Pay in-store at Australia Post by cash, cheque or EFTPOS. Please write your payment reference number and name on the back of the cheque.

Payment Reference No:

Amount Due: \$15,214.00

Due Date: 08 AUG 2024



End of supplied evidence

This document submitted by Steven Ridd, Managing Director, Wistmans Wood Holdings Pty Limited [ACN 600 331 931] as trustee for Wistmans Wood Trust [ABN 51 965 308 493 ] trading as Nature Trail. Registered Address: 5 Kundibar Street KATOOMBA NSW 2780.]

By email [icac@icac.nsw.gov.au](mailto:icac@icac.nsw.gov.au)



INDEPENDENT COMMISSION  
AGAINST CORRUPTION

Level 7, 255 Elizabeth Street  
Sydney, New South Wales  
Australia